DARK HORSE MAVERICK

6 of 9

frank MILLER

HELL and BACK

A SIN CITY® love story

frank **MILLER** *story & art*
lynn **VARLEY** *cover colors*
diana **SCHUTZ** *editor*
cary **GRAZZINI** *designer*
mike **RICHARDSON** *publisher*

DAWN IS STILL HOURS AWAY.

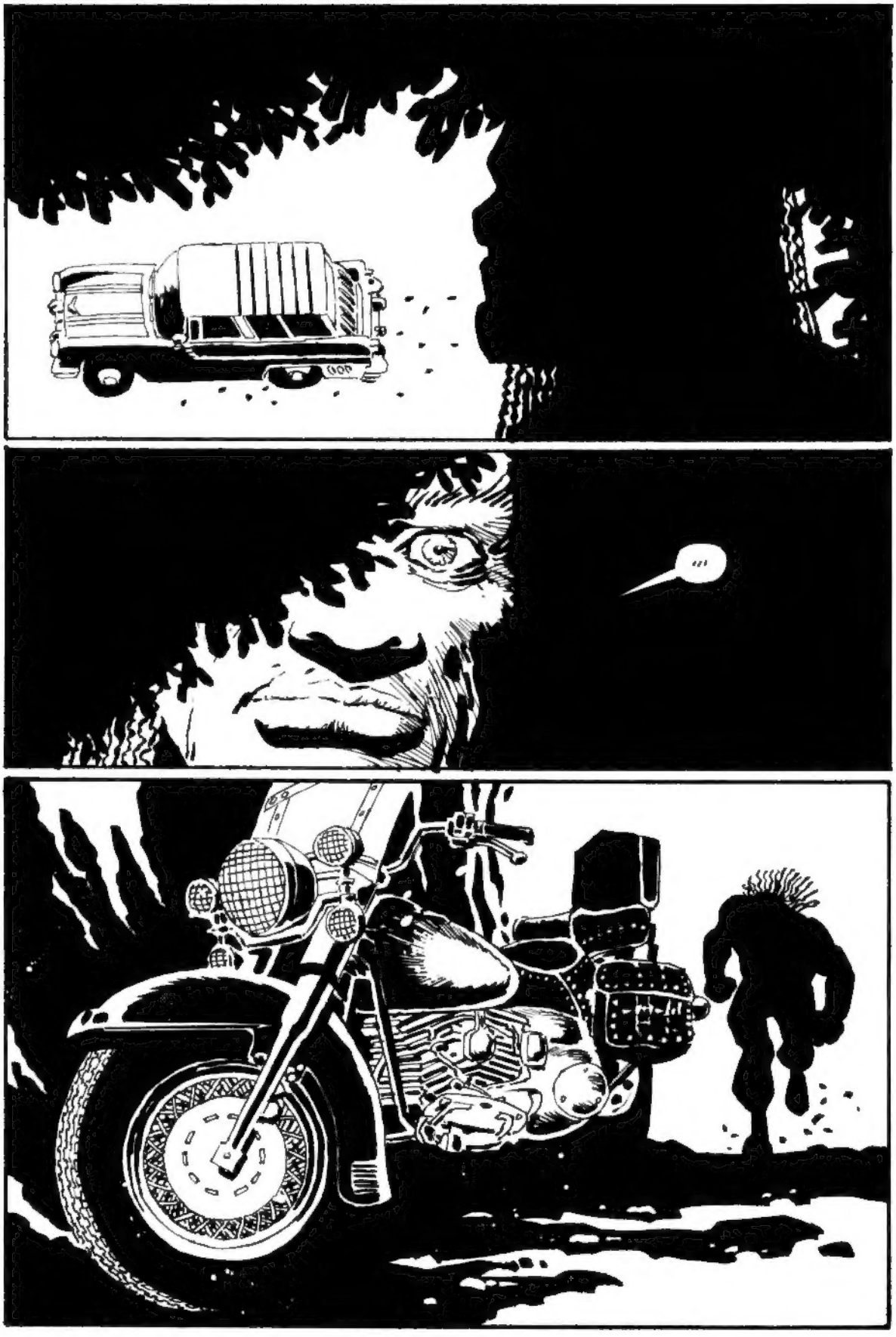
THE WIND BLOWS COLD.
STEEL SLIDES FROM OILED LEATHER.

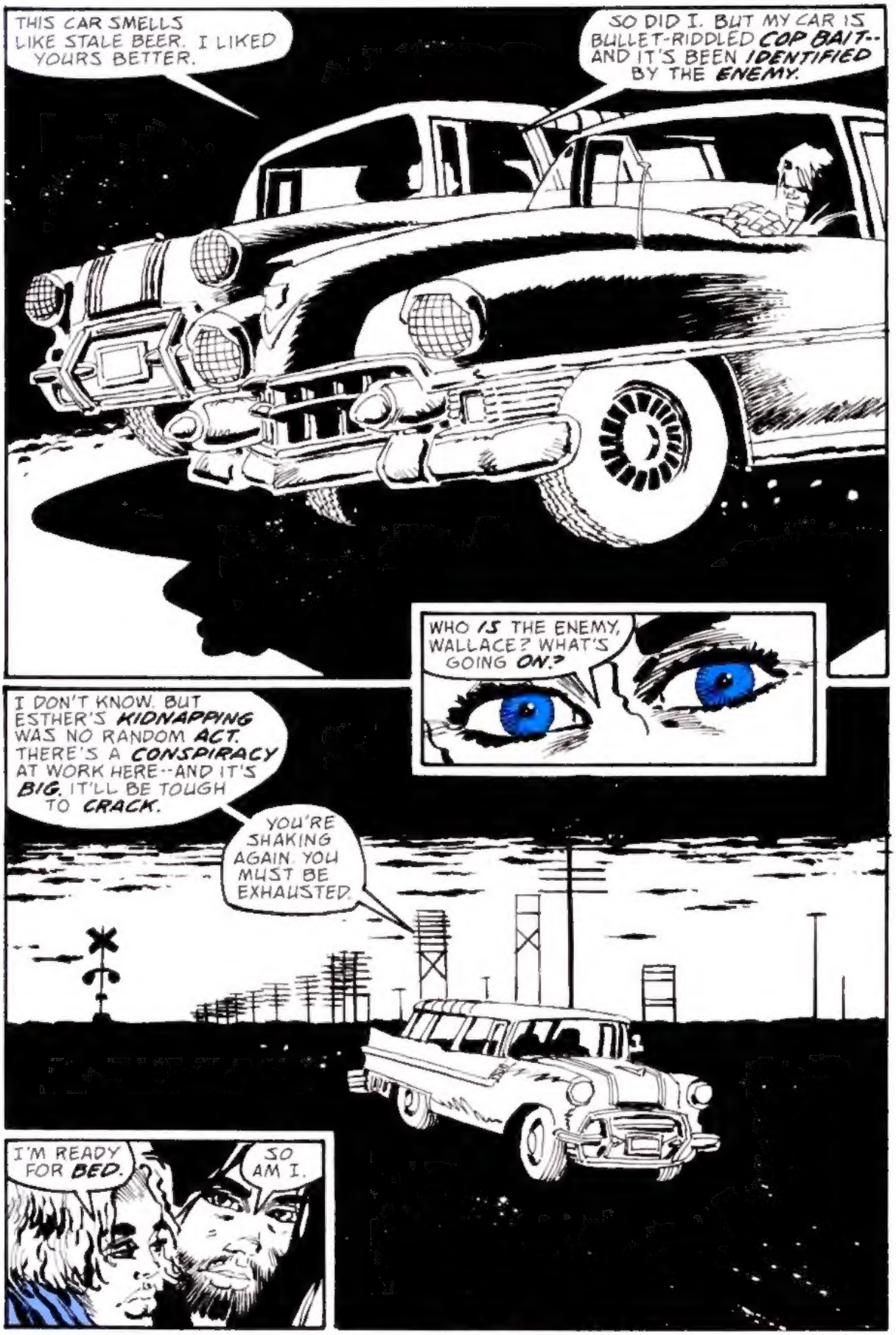
WHUNGG
THPP

GOOD MORNING, CAPTAIN. YOU'RE UP EARLY.
"CARPE AURORUM," I ALWAYS SAY.
YOU HEARD IT OFTEN ENOUGH.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE, COMMANDER.
IT'S BEEN A DAMN LONG WHILE.
HERE COMES ONE OF HIS HUGS.
HERE'S HOPING MY RIBS ARE GOOD AND FLEXIBLE.

MY RIBS HOLD UP FINE. NOT SO MUCH AS A CRACK.
GOOD TO SEE YOU, MAN.
I KNOW THAT LOOK. WHO NEEDS KILLING?
NOBODY, JUST YET. I WANT TO BORROW THE HEAP.
YEAH, I NOTICED YOUR OLD LeSABRE COULD USE SOME BODY WORK--

--THOUGH I GOTTA SAY YOUR PASSENGER DOESN'T. THAT BABE'S HYDRAULIC.
LOOKS LIKE A WILD ONE TO ME.
SHE IS THAT.
YOU MAKE THAT SOUND LIKE A BAD THING.
TAKE IT WHERE YOU CAN GET IT, BUDDY. A MAN HAS NEEDS.
WHAT I NEED IS THE HEAP.
HA! LOOSEN UP, WILL YOU?
THERE'S MY BABY--ALL GASSED UP AND LOADED FOR WAR.
ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO YOU FOR?
YEAH. TWO THINGS. A TRACE ON THIS PHONE NUMBER--
--AND A PAIR OF HAND-CUFFS.
MY MAN!
AND I'LL BET SHE GOES FOR IT, YOU LUCKY DOG!




THIS CAR SMELLS LIKE STALE BEER. I LIKED YOURS BETTER.
SO DID I. BUT MY CAR IS BULLET-RIDDLED COP BAIT-- AND IT'S BEEN IDENTIFIED BY THE ENEMY.
WHO IS THE ENEMY, WALLACE? WHAT'S GOING ON?
I DON'T KNOW. BUT ESTHER'S KIDNAPPING WAS NO RANDOM ACT. THERE'S A CONSPIRACY AT WORK HERE--AND IT'S BIG. IT'LL BE TOUGH TO CRACK.
YOU'RE SHAKING AGAIN. YOU MUST BE EXHAUSTED.
I'M READY FOR BED.
SO AM I.

Last Hope
MOTEL
VACANCY
SHALL I FETCH YOU THE GIDEON?
NO WE'RE NOT HERE TO READ THE BIBLE.
I'M HERE TO GIVE ORDERS--AND YOU'RE HERE TO FOLLOW THEM

KLIK

DO EXACTLY WHAT I TELL YOU TO DO OBEY MY EVERY WORD.
YES, WALLACE

TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF
YES SIR

LIE DOWN ON THE BED.
YES, BOSS.

CLOSE YOUR EYES.
YES, MASTER.

CHINK
SNAP
MY GOODNESS, HONEY, YOU'RE FULL OF SURPRISES
DON'T GET ME WRONG, THAT WASN'T A COMPLAINT.

WALLACE!

I'M NOT ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HATES THE SMELL OF CIGARETTES BUT I NOTICE IT
SNAP
IT CLINGS TO THE HAIR AND CLOTHES OF ANYBODY WHO SMOKES--AND ANYBODY WHO LIVES WITH A SMOKER
THERE WASN'T A TRACE OF IT ON ESTHER YOU'RE NOT HER ROOMMATE
KRUNCH

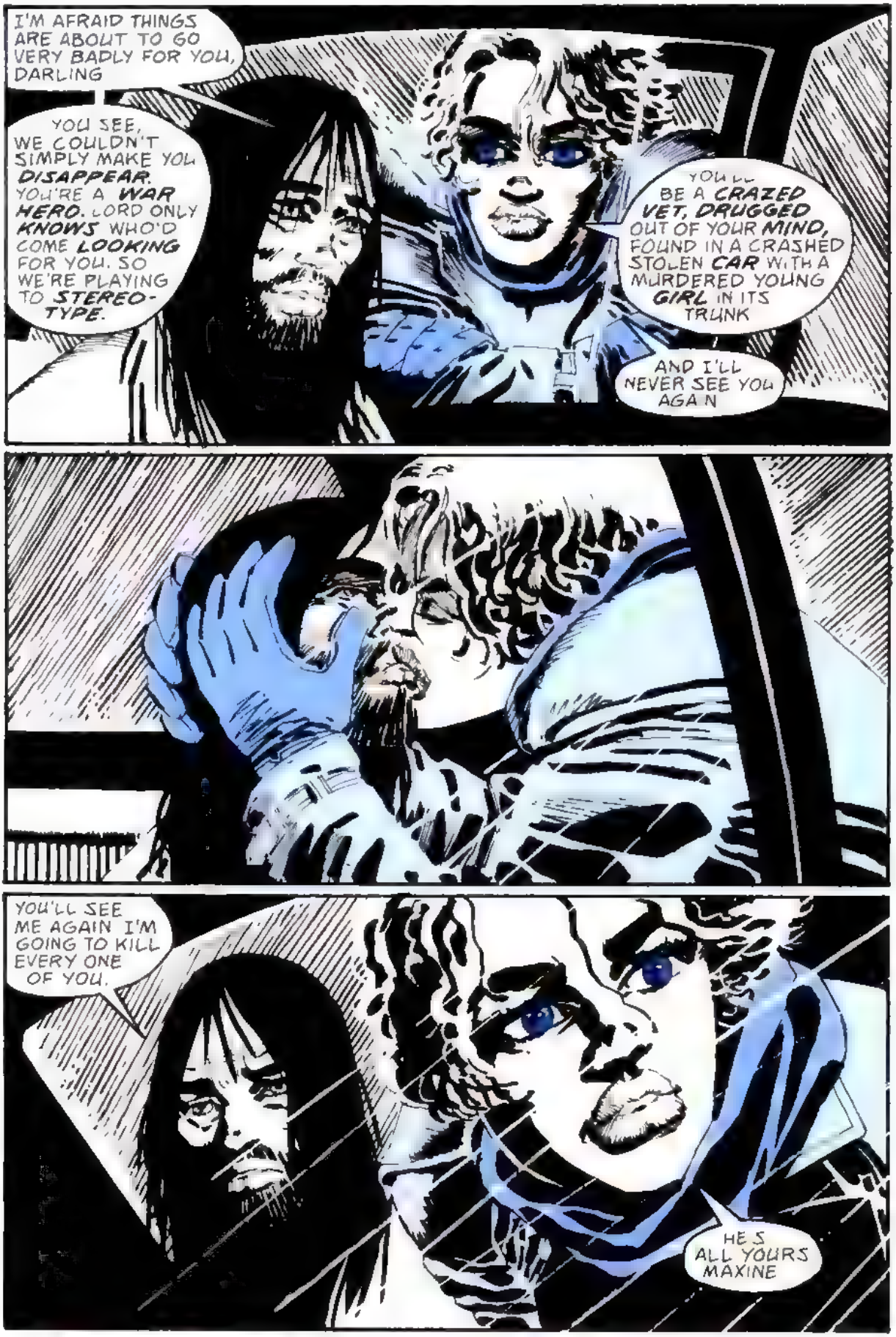
YOU SHOULD'VE FOLLOWED YOUR OWN ADVICE, LOVE.
YOU SHOULD'VE STAYED AWAY FROM THE WINDOWS.
GAA
SPAK

I CEASE TO EXIST.

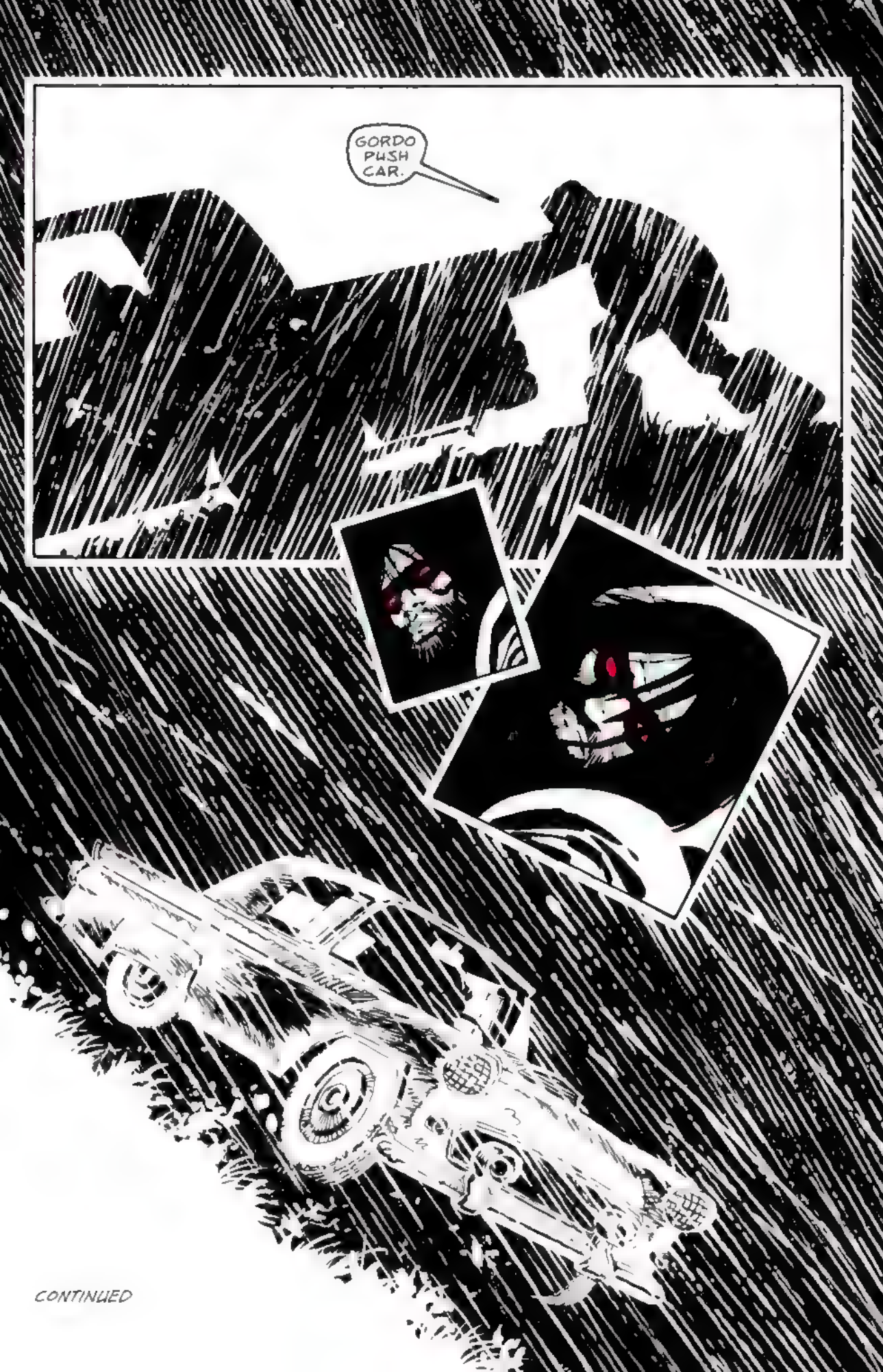
SPLAT
YOU DROPPED HIM
I CAN'T COUNT ON YOU FOR ANYTHING!
GORDO SORRY GORDO FALL DOWN GROUND SLIPPERY

-NH?
HE'S AWAKE.
DON'T WORRY. HE'S GOT ENOUGH TRANK IN HIM TO KEEP CLARK KENT DOWN
GORDO CATCH BREATH FEEL BETTER.
GORDO PICK MAN BACK UP NOW

YOU LACK YOUR USUAL AFTERGLOW, DELIA. COULD IT BE YOU ACTUALLY MET A FELLOW WHO COULD RESIST YOUR LEGENDARY WILES?
HMF! THE GUY'S A MONK!
ALL I HEARD WAS ESTHER! ESTHER! ESTHER!
MAN HAS LARGE PENIS
POOR DEAR THERE ARE ONLY TWO THINGS YOU LIKE TO DO WITH MEN -AND YOU DIDN'T GET TO DO EITHER OF THEM
YOU DIDN'T GET TO KILL HIM, AND YOU DIDN'T GET TO--
YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO MOCK ME
GORDO PUT MAN IN CAR. THEN GORDO PUSH CAR
SOON AS GORDO IS TOLD TO PUSH CAR
THE COCKTAIL IS ALL SET IT'S A KICKER. HE'LL BE FLYING.
WAIT A MOMENT, MAXINE
LET ME SAY GOOD-BYE TO HIM.


I'M AFRAID THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GO VERY BADLY FOR YOU, DARLING
YOU SEE, WE COULDN'T SIMPLY MAKE YOU DISAPPEAR. YOU'RE A WAR HERO. LORD ONLY KNOWS WHO'D COME LOOKING FOR YOU. SO WE'RE PLAYING TO STEREO-TYPE.
YOU'LL BE A CRAZED VET, DRUGGED OUT OF YOUR MIND, FOUND IN A CRASHED STOLEN CAR WITH A MURDERED YOUNG GIRL IN ITS TRUNK
AND I'LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN
YOU'LL SEE ME AGAIN I'M GOING TO KILL EVERY ONE OF YOU.
HE'S ALL YOURS MAXINE

I HOPE YOU REALIZE YOU'VE BROKEN MY HEART
GORDO PUSH CAR NOW?
NOT YET, GORDO LET MAXINE DO HER JOB
THUNK
NOW, GORDO PUSH CAR



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A little lesson I learned about how the media work . . .

It was six months or so ago. I got a phone call from Dark Horse, telling me that a reporter from *U.S. News & World Report*, the weekly newsmagazine, that one that makes *Time* and *Newsweek* seem supercharged with energy, was interested in interviewing me about the brave new world of comic books. I jumped at the chance. When it comes to promoting comics that aren't pabulum, I'm an evangelist. Praise the Lord and pass the Mylar snugs.

The reporter called. It was an ambush. A damned setup. The reporter wasn't interested in our art form, our industry, nothing like that: she just wanted to get quotes to support her evidently-already-composed "News You Can Use" piece that was ready to go, an excoriation of modern comics as (here we go again) a menace to "our children." We had a nasty conversation. She didn't get anything she wanted.

Nor did she, apparently, from Maggie Thompson of *Comics Buyer's Guide*, to whom (Maggie reported in *CBG*) she complained she wasn't getting the right quotes from anybody to support her censorious position.

Which might have led an investigative journalist to rethink the premise of her article, a reasonable person might conclude. Instead, nothing. *Nada*. I've scoured the rag every week since and there's been not one word on the subject.

Here's some "News You Can Use." *They come to their conclusions before they start their research*.

Not exactly what I'd call journalism.

Don't these fools get it? Don't they realize that we're nothing more than the appetizer—and *they're* the main course?

Christiaan Meijer
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Hell, what a turn! I know you announced Delia (somewhere, sometime), but I did not expect her showing up *that* quickly. Seems that we will learn something about the Colonel and his people. I'm curious whether "Blue Eyes" will make a decision on her own, in the end, or keep on being one of the Colonel's best girl scouts. Maybe I'm wrong, taking the wrong track, but "And what have you done to Esther?" is the right turn, leaving us totally puzzled and longing for answers. Hope to see some of them in the next issue.

Anna Marie Cator
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Almost every love story has one: the busybody matron who pokes her nose in everywhere and can neither be avoided nor ignored. Whether they are as tiresome as Oscar Wilde's Lady Bracknell or as sticky sweet as Christmas peppermints, it was a real treat to find one folded carefully inside issues #1 and #3 of *Hell and Back*, a *Sin City* love story.

Wallace described Mrs. Mendoza as a sweetheart in issue #1, but how he felt about her could not have been proven better than when he enveloped her in a thankful hug on page 25 of issue #3, after she presented him with Esther's business card. Like all busybody matrons, Mrs. Mendoza doesn't want to see Wallace lonely.

I love characters like Mrs. Mendoza. Almost everybody has at one point in his or her life met such a woman, listened to prodding questions, and been helped or hindered by her actions. These women are real gems.

Keith Gorman
sparky@iberonline.es

"Longhair" is well on the way to being your best *Sin City* character yet. The story is a killer. I don't have any idea which direction it's going to take, or, better still, what other *Sin City* characters will show up. Your Delia hint in the last BLAM! column—*aahhhh*! It looks as if it's going to be seven more months of *Sin City* torture until we finally know who's been to *Hell and Back*.

Alex Le wants you to go back to superheroes. Whatever floats your boat, Alex. *Sin City* isn't a movie and it's not just a comic; it's a world of its own.

My wish for 2000? Marv, Dwight, Hartigan, "Longhair," and the girls kickin' ass together, a sort of superhero summer crossover!

P.S. Great cover, great colors.

Jeff Dyer
Dubuque, IA

While *Hell and Back* isn't packing the same punch as *That Yellow Bastard* (my favorite *Sin City* yarn so far), there have been some great moments.

I love the new format with the covers. The word balloons have been intriguing and very attention-grabbing. I'm curious about the story line and wondering what will happen to Esther as Wallace continues to pose heroically. Still, the story just hasn't grabbed me by the throat like previous yarns have. Maybe I'm expecting too much; maybe you're just getting warmed up. Either way, I'll finish the ride and see where it ends up.

One comment that might be considered a complaint: it seems that very little happens in each issue of *Hell and Back*. I flipped back through issue #3 and noticed a lot of full-page shots that (in my opinion) are not totally necessary. While some are powerful, it would seem that more story could be included if certain images were a bit smaller. I mean, did we need to spend three pages on Wallace entering the room of "Blue Eyes"? On the other hand, it would seem the revelation on page 24 deserved more space and could have benefited from a splash page. I'd be curious to hear your rationale for deciding which images get the full-page treatment and which don't. I suppose that from a creative point of view it's very liberating to be able to determine how the book is laid out. At Marvel or DC, you certainly had to fit within editorial guidelines.

I guess I'm just looking for something to complain about. You're such a damn genius, Frank, I don't want you gettin' a big head with too much sappy praise. I'm thankful you're doing *Sin City* and looking forward to an unpredictable finish for *Hell and Back*. C'mon, Frank, knock me out!

Rory Keogh Gibbons, Jr.
Union City, CA

I've been a fan of yours since your *Daredevil* years. But I'm growing increasingly hesitant to having your product on my standing order! I'm no fan of reductio ad absurdum.

I haven't gotten my hands on a copy of *Booze, Broads, & Bullets*, but I fear the same is true for *Hell and Back*, a *Sin City* love story. reductionism. You use the word "grammar" in your first issue. I don't know how many of you have had the opportunity to read the Nebula and Hugo Award-winning trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson, but *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*,

and *Blue Mars* are exemplary examples of rhetoric. Robinson was obviously threatened by Putnam, Hayes, and Bartlett, and the Irish Republican Army in regard to Antarctica. It is illogical to proofread the grammar of prepared rhetoric, which constitutes the trivium of the liberal arts.

But I had had neurosurgery, and, unlike Martha Washington, I'm not enjoying any of the chips in my left forebrain! I always sneezed in threes until my cybernetic neurosurgery of September 16, 1994. I sneeze now in twos, making this a pro et con. Those neurosurgeons would make a great, fabulous topic to cover in *Sin City* or *Martha Washington*. I picture it as something like *The Terminal Man* by Crichton. However, his reductionism was *The Lost World*. It was simply: up, down, wet.

Another example of reductio ad absurdum was when they placed Bruce Jones' name on the cover of two *Tarzan* books. But besides the reductionism there should be one page count, one price. All 36-page books should hold at $2.50! You're really undermining the genre by having prices for a 36-page book fluctuate between $1.99 and $2.95 and every price in between; by the way, when Bruce Jones formed the Pacific Universe, he really shone.

Now it appears the creator of *Tarzan*, Edgar Rice Burroughs, has been nanotech-resurrected! Disney and a number of others have been nanotech-resurrected, as well! Including Wagner! Bill Graham, Gene Roddenberry, and my hero Jack (The King) Kirby have been nanotech-resurrected! But, lo and behold, they've been given the automaton implant! Since we've already perfected the transporter with inorganic matter, organic can't be far behind.

So, cyberpunks unite! I think fiction isn't keeping up with fact, and therein lies the dilemma. *ER*'s October 29, 1998 episode was specifically directed at me. I could tell through my optic thalamus implant—my magpie implant, an implant that broadcasts all that I think into 3-D audio, leaving me bereft of high technology in a high-tech society. What's the point of onomatopoeia? Encryptographic devices to secretify *[sic]* transactions aren't going to do me or anyone who's been to the Faustian neurosurgeon any good.

Avoid mayonnaise.

Ben Varkentine
BenVarkent@aol.com

This is shaping up to be a very different *Sin City* series. The covers with dialogue, the "longhair f@gg%t" quality of the hero, and the almost animated look of some pages (I know Frank has said there will be no movie, and I respect that, but sometimes I trip on how sweet a really good *Sin City* animated movie could be. Maybe it's best to keep it in the theaters of our minds, however) give me the impression of Frank taking the things he learned while stretching his artistic muscles on *300* and applying them to *Sin City*. The *City* books can, of course, be anything and everything; the only rule, as I understand it, is if it's *Sin City*, Frank writes and draws it—nobody else. He could draw it "*Sin City*: The Animated Series" style, and it would still be *Sin City*.

Meanwhile, Esther is going through a real mind-f&ck. One's regard for oneself has to be pretty high to resist bombardment like that; it plays on all the fears each of us has at some time or another.

In his obsession, Wallace has something of a calmer, prettier Marv to him, a Marv who had other outlets for his emotions than rage. Perhaps, then, he has learned to harness and control that rage. But like most *Sin City* men (and not at all like real men, heavens to Betsy, no), his weakness appears to be perfect-looking women. And then there's "Blue Eyes." Those of us who know the *Booze, Broads, & Bullets* stories know that Wallace had better be watching his own ass more than hers, inviting as it might be.

Unrelated aside: What would happen if Frank illustrated a story of Neil Gaiman's?

Me and Neil? Well, umm. . . we'd probably kill each other.

Mike Hendricks
Kingsville, TX

Damn, that cover looks good. Fredric's needle is a thousand times more intimidating than Ghost's guns, a million times more intimidating than Lobo's fangs. Lynn's background is gorgeous, as always. Good thing you gave her plenty of room for that background color. If you're smart, you'll keep doing that.

Brutal cops. We've seen it plenty of times before. But the transsexual angle was clever. Old ideas are best used ironically.

Wallace is definitely Sin City's most centered resident. Meditating to regain his lost memory. Confidently reining himself in and waiting for his chance to find Esther. Yet he's able to summon enough strength to (almost) overcome a dose of tranquilizer.

That guy with the trank gun—a formidable villain. Strong and fast. Clean and precise. A marked improvement over the mob's usual simpletons. Speaking of formidable villains—what the hell is Manute doing driving around like a chauffeur? This superior character should be in charge of more important duties, though this aspect does fit the big guy's strategy in the past: throw enemies off guard by making them assume he's simply an underling (like he does to Dwight in *A Dame To Kill For*). Hope we get to see Manute and Wallace face off soon!

The best scene? Like you have to ask. "So much about you is going to change. You're a very lucky young woman." My God, there isn't an ounce of tension in his body! The Colonel can't only want Esther to be a prostitute—he wouldn't make her wake up nude on an iron platform in the snow if he did. No, I get the feeling he wants to make her physically strong—a new addition to his army.

The shoe. Straight out of *Cinderella*! And I suspect once the Colonel's done with her, Esther will be just as unrecognizable!

Throw in a puker, a junkie, a couple of whores walking out of the precinct over a guy with a shiv in his gut, a bum, a drunk, and a bartender with a dick for a nose, and you have another slammin' issue.

Jason Tenter
tenter@netcom.ca

I came to the letters column of issue #4 of the new series and was pleasantly surprised! I found it quite unfortunate to hear about DC's pull of that special, but then again I wouldn't have heard about it if it hadn't been pulled—and *Wizard* hadn't mentioned it. Kyle Baker is an amazing artist, though, and I never even saw an ad for the darned book. Editorial standards? Does that mean I don't get to read Vertigo books anymore?

Has the special become very popular? I want to see it. I have a question, though. Since it was technically released—a few copies—would it still be eligible for an Eisner? I don't know about you, but I'd love to see that. I also hope I'll get a chance to see a copy of it.

Anyway, Frank, I love the evolution your art has taken, from *Ronin* (the earliest work I've seen), and I commend you on the new series (though it has been a bit harder to get into than the earlier tales). May tomorrow hold many more epic stories from the inkwell.

Heck, now they'll *have* to republish it. Won't they? To be fair, keep in mind: Marvel's worse.

—FM

GALLERY

paul **GRIST**

GALLERY

jason **PEARSON**

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